DSHS Urges Precautions as West Nile Season Nears

News Release
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The Texas Department of State Health Services advises the public to take precautions to avoid mosquito bites that may lead to West Nile illness. As we enter the warmer months, the risk of exposure to virus-carrying mosquitoes increases.

The intensity of West Nile activity in Texas fluctuates from year to year and depends on a variety of factors including the weather, the numbers of birds and mosquitoes that maintain and spread the virus, and human behavior. The season can last until the first hard freeze of the year.

To reduce exposure to West Nile virus people should:

- Use an EPA-approved insect repellent every time they go outside and follow the instructions on the label. EPA-approved repellents contain DEET, picaridin, IR3535, and certain oil of lemon eucalyptus and para-methane-diol products.
- Regularly drain standing water, including water collecting in empty cans, tires, buckets, clogged rain gutters and saucers under potted plants. Mosquitoes that spread West Nile virus breed in stagnant water.
- Wear long sleeves and pants when outside, especially around dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active.
- Use air conditioning or make sure there are screens on all doors and windows to keep mosquitoes from entering the home.

Symptoms of the milder form of illness, West Nile fever, can include headache, fever, muscle and joint aches, nausea and fatigue. People with West Nile fever typically recover on their own, although symptoms may last for several weeks. Symptoms of the more serious form of illness, West Nile neuroinvasive disease, can include those of West Nile fever plus neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness and paralysis. Up to 80 percent of people infected with the virus will have no symptoms.

There are no medications to treat or vaccines to prevent West Nile virus infection. People over 50 years old and those with other health issues are at a higher risk of becoming seriously ill or dying when they become infected with the virus. If people have symptoms and suspect West Nile virus infection, they should contact their healthcare provider.

There are no confirmed human cases of West Nile virus so far this year. Last year, there were 183 reported human cases of West Nile illness in Texas, including 14 deaths. West Nile case counts by county will be posted at www.dshs.state.tx.us/news/updates.shtm.